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ABSTRACT

The problems facing public education in the United States today are many. School-based management is one type of reform that takes into consideration the diversity of student populations and builds shared goals among the students, staff, school, and community. This paper summarizes research findings on the components of effective school restructuring, particularly school-based management. A review of current literature on school reform suggests two themes: (1) the importance of involving all affected groups at all stages of reform; and (2) the establishment of priorities. Theodore Sizer (1991) suggested that school reform can be initiated within existing budgets. Because school reform is not instantaneous, educators must not disband reform efforts if immediate resolution of educational problems does not materialize. (Contains 10 references.) (LMI)

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ED 399 640

EDUCATIONAL REFORM: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

BY

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When the public school systems of the United States are discussed, one common strand usually runs through the conversation; the public school systems of the United States are not producing students who are successfully able to compete with students of other technology-driven countries.

On July 18, 1991 the Office of the Press Secretary of the White House released a presidential fact sheet. The fact sheet was entitled America 2000: The President's Education Strategy. This fact sheet described certain plans and procedures that would, once again, place the United States as the front runner in providing a first class education to all of its citizens. One of the proposed solutions to erase this educational deficit is a drastic restructuring of the public school systems in the United States, to be completed by the year 2000.

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Restructuring

Educational reform, also referred to as restructuring, is the process of school improvement. The term restructuring is used by different people to connote various meanings, and conflicting claims and contentions result. Joyce (1991) has identified five areas in which restructuring should be emphasized. These areas are: (a) collegiality - developing cohesive and professional relationships within school faculties and connecting them more closely with their surrounding neighborhoods; (b) research - helping school faculties study research findings about effective school practices or instructional alternatives; (c) site specific information - helping faculties collect and analyze data about their schools and their student's progress; (d) curriculum initiatives - introducing change within subject areas or, as in the case of computer education, across the curriculum areas; and (e) instructional initiatives - organizing teachers to study teaching skills and strategies. Elmore (1990) stated the process of school reform usually refers to at least one of the following: (a) technical changes in

changes in the relationships between students, parents, and schools; and (c) the occupational structure of educators which includes creating a more collegial work environment and increased teacher involvement in the governance of education. According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (1991), the need for restructuring the educational system has been precipitated by the following: (a) new types of students; (b) new social and economic demands; (c) new knowledge about learning; and (d) the current education system is not producing satisfactory results.

As indicated by the ECS, the educational problems of today are multitudinous. These problems range from diversity in the student body and discipline-related issues to the lack of adequate resources and the lack of parent involvement. In addressing the educational problems of today, Sizer (1991) stated American education is stuck on well-intentioned, deeply traditional, but flawed ideas about learning and teaching. Ayers (1991) developed a list of the causes regarding the nature of educational problems. This list included the following: (a) an inequitable

distribution of educational resources: (b) the stubborn will of a range of self-interested bureaucracies; (c) rigid, unresponsive classroom culture; and (d) lack of response to the diversity and uniqueness each student brings to school.

Presently, students are reporting to school with varying amounts and types of diversity due to their race, socioeconomic status, cultural practices, religious beliefs, etc. These factors impact upon the quality of education provided by school personnel and received by the students. School personnel who recognize the presence of diverse groups possess the ability to readily respond to the various needs of the particular groups. In order to fully respond to the issue of diversity in education, it is essential that the following concepts be addressed: (a) the aim(s) of education; (b) the role of the schools; (c) the various types and classifications of diverse groups; and (d) the identification, development, and implementation of effective educational programs to transcend such diversity.

Site - Based Management

Joyce (1991) expressed the need for major school improvement plans to begin with collegial faculties using research and site-specific information to study and improve curriculum and instruction. Educators considering school reform should examine site-based management. According to Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1989), site-based management has six benefits: (1) stakeholders, particularly parents and teachers, are able to influence school policy decisions; (2) employee morale and motivation is boosted; (3) school-wide planning processes are strengthened; (4) instruction improves; (5) effective schools' characteristics develop; and (6) students' academic achievement improves. Site-based management, founded upon research that requires early and constant parental involvement, would take into consideration the diversity in the student population while readily addressing the specific needs of the indigenous clientele. Further, it would facilitate the development of consistent and congruent goals between the students, the staff, the school, and the community.

Goal congruence is of the utmost importance because it can serve to foster a sense of collegiality and encourage all to work towards the successful accomplishment of stated and agreed upon goals. The compatibility between personal, educational, and institutional goals is vital because the strategies employed to achieve personal goals can concurrently serve as strategies to achieve institutional goals and vice-versa. Knowing that the individual and the institution are working collaboratively provides all involved parties with the impetus to work towards accomplishing personal as well as institutional goals. Additionally, those in power would be less resistant towards assisting individuals in the achievement of their personal goals since a concomitant of personal achievement would be an enhancement of the institution's overall productivity.

The underlying assumption of site-based decision-making is that the reduction of bureaucratic controls on schools prompts principals, teachers, and parents to use greater initiative in tailoring instruction to meet the needs of the students (Guskey & Peterson, 1996).

According to Guskey and Peterson, the following 11 steps are necessary for improving the gap between school-based decision making and classroom practices.

1. A clear mission that focuses on student teaching and learning
2. Clear and explicit goals for the decision-making process
3. School-based decision making that is viewed as a process for bringing about a broad set of reforms
4. A governance structure that gives administrators, teachers, and parents real power and authority
5. Responsiveness to parents' concerns and parental involvement in the school community
6. Redesigned schedules which allow teachers time to participate in decision making
7. High quality professional development
8. Obtainment of necessary expertise on which to base decisions
9. Active support from all levels of the organization
10. Acknowledgement of all accomplishments
11. A collaborative school culture focused on improvement

School-based management requires role changes at every level (Spilman, 1996). In order to be effective open lines of communication and high levels of trust are necessary. Additionally, the principal must shift from top-down management to the role of facilitator and supporter.

The reform strategy of site-based management would facilitate collaborative decision-making. Collaborative decision-making involves teachers, parents, students, and community members in decision-making roles traditionally held by building and/or district administrators. Glickman (1990) suggests that for successful schools, education is a collective rather than individual enterprise. Glickman further proposes that there are three consistent themes common to effective schools. These components are: (a) collective action; (b) agreed upon purpose; and (c) belief in accomplishment. Schmoker and Wilson (1993) relate that inordinate amounts of success relative to collaborative decision-making have been experienced by several schools and the car manufacturer Toyota in the United States. These successes are partly attributed

to the implementation of theories by W. Edwards Deming and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi which stress teamwork and productive work environments.

For many years public schools have been considered the private fiefdoms of individual principals who answered to no authority other than the central office. In many neighborhoods (especially lower socio-economic ones) parents were not made to feel part of the school experience and were discouraged from participating in any school activities other than PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences. To have parental input in planning any part of the curriculum was an unheard of idea. School reform and the election of local school councils have initiated a new era of school and community based education. Ideally, this means that school reform should emanate from the grass roots (bottom to top) rather than reform beginning in the central office and filtering down. In a combination research report and critique of today's public education, Goodlad (1984) presented a set of interconnected principles to guide school improvement. According to Goodlad, strategies to enhance school

improvement include schoolwide surveys, individual teacher assessment of classroom practices, and consciousness regarding class time utilization. The implementation of these strategies would serve to personalize the need for school improvement and empower the principal, teachers, students and parents at each school by providing them with input into the reform process.

In a report on public education entitled, "In Learning in America - Schools That Work," Roger Mudd indicated several key factors that impact upon the status of public education in America. These factors include: (a) belief in children; (b) collegiality; (c) shared governance; and (d) commitment to children. When incorporated into the school reform initiative, the above factors have afforded vast dividends to all involved parties - the administrators, the community, the staff, and the students. Site-based management can positively impact upon school reform through the provision of opportunities to enhance the aforementioned factors.

When planning and implementing school reform,

Sizer (1991) expressed the need for the synergistic character of a school to be taken into account. Everything of importance interacts with all the other items of importance. According to Sizer, adding an element means eliminating something else and emphasizing one area requires the deemphasis of other areas. Therefore, significant school change requires addressing all of the consequential elements of a school simultaneously. This includes reexamining assumptions, renegotiating compromises, and prioritizing in a decisive manner.

Discussion

Developing and implementing an effective reform strategy is far from easy. It requires examination and evaluation of the current state of affairs at the educational institution. It also requires the establishment of goals and strategies. Perhaps, first and foremost, effective school reform necessitates a commitment to providing the best educational experience to all students regardless of their differences and/or deficiencies. Will (1989) stated the challenge exists for educators to take what has been learned from

special programs and begin to transfer that knowledge into the regular classroom. According to Will, multi-pronged strategies are needed to ensure academic success. These strategies include providing students with increased instructional time, providing support systems for teachers, empowering principals with control of all programs and resources at the building level, and developing different instructional approaches. The implementation of such strategies will allow educators to construct an educational environment that is a broad and rich continuum instead of a series of discrete programs. Additionally, this will facilitate the provision of adequate resources and personalized instruction to encourage each child to reach his or her greatest potential.

Current literature suggests two common themes when discussing school reform: (a) the involvement of all affected groups is essential at all stages of school reform; and (b) the establishment of priorities. Some observers predict that school reform can be a costly venture, but the benefits accrued from modernizing the current system of public education far outweigh

increased expenditures. Some observers feel that reform can be achieved within current budget constraints. Sizer (1991) stated reform can be achieved within existing budgets. Further, Sizer listed the following as necessary elements for achieving reform within existing budgets: (a) an emphasis on of team teaching; (b) a sharply focused curriculum; and (c) simplification of the administrative system. The implication is that school reform can be initiated on small scale bases with dedicated staff working together to provide quality education to all students. Perhaps the most pressing argument concerning the monetary question is related to the cost the nation if the public education system is not improved.

Unfortunately, the benefits of school reform are not instantaneously achieved for a quick-fix solution to the problems prevalent in education today is non-existent. Educators must be patient and not disband reform efforts because immediate resolution of educational problems do not materialize. Further, in the absence of formal reform strategies, the

responsibility of modifying instruction to provide each student with stimulating learning experiences belongs to the classroom teacher who can be an individual agent of change.

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